

1 Thessalonians Devotionals

Read 1 Thessalonians 1

**“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers
1 Thessalonians 1:6-7**

Baseball was always my favorite sport as a kid, which became doubly frustrating due to how poorly I played the game. My parents were both great ballplayers and spent a lot of hours trying to help me improve. We also bought instructional videos that I watched repeatedly before heading outside to emulate. I read books and never missed a practice, and yet there was little improvement because as much as I loved the game, I was never able to play it with joy. My fear of making mistakes and letting my teammates down prevented me from enjoying my rare opportunities to play, and my fears caused me to forget all the lessons and instruction I had received outside of the game.

These young Thessalonian believers are commended by Paul because they had received the gospel in the midst of many trials, and by the Holy Spirit had found joy and the ability to be examples to other believers. Many of us can become so stressed by the trials and complications of life that we fail to find the joy of God’s persistent work in our lives. As a result, we aren’t living a faith that can serve as an example to others because we’ve become narrowed to considering nothing beyond our own circumstances. Jesus’ salvation for eternity does not remove the hardships of earth. In fact, our willingness to stand contrary to the wisdom and message of the world invites trials into our relationships, careers, and daily decisions. **Do you struggle to find joy in your life and faith? Remember the joy that had been found by these Thessalonians: Joy in the Word of God that had been spoken to them. Joy in the presence of the Holy Spirit who was with them in every trial. Joy in setting an example of testimony for other believers as we reveal how God has worked out our situations. Happiness is a fleeting emotion, but joy is a mindset that comes from God who has encouraged us to rise above the moments.**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2

**“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”
1 Thessalonians 2:8**

As a Southern Baptist, I have often been frustrated at our denominational focus on reporting numbers. If a church wants to establish goals to see a certain number of people choose Christ or be baptized, I believe there can be value in creating constant reminders. These are great ways to keep a focus for our churches of those who have been saved and those yet to be saved. However, we must be careful to never simply allow those decisions to become numbers alone. To share the gospel and see someone choose Christ was never intended to be a momentary celebration without continuous investment.

Jesus called us to make disciples. While we often emphasize the initial point of decision, which is important, the church in general has not always emphasized that those who share then become

those who care. A past SBC President, Ronnie Floyd, says the great failure of the 20th century church was a lack of making ever-maturing disciples. This is an indictment on those who pressed people for decisions, without a willingness to grow them as followers of Jesus. **How could you help our church make new disciples? We provide new believers with a packet to walk them through initial understandings of prayer, worship, and other spiritual disciplines. We also want to have more one-on-one disciplers who would be willing to meet weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly with new believers to help their walk with Christ. If I have an opportunity to share the gospel away from my city, I always help the person to find a local church or to identify a local believer they know who could bring them to church and walk with them in faith. Be ready to share and be ready to care. The gospel saves the soul, while also providing a brand new life to be enjoyed here on earth, but it's a life we could never guess at on our own. Discipleship is necessary.**

Read 1 Thessalonians 3

“and we sent Timothy...to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.” 1 Thess. 3:2-3

Colonel William Westmoreland was a dedicated Airborne officer, who commanded elements of both the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions in his career, and eventually all forces in Vietnam. On a full day of parachute training, one of the planes crashed, killing everyone aboard.

Westmoreland immediately ordered the remaining planes to resume their takeoff schedule and complete the remaining jumps for the day, with Westmoreland himself jumping from the very next plane. Outside of military circles, Westmoreland's actions were viewed as cold and unfeeling. However, Westmoreland's superiors later determined the Colonel's quick actions to resume the jumps, and to jump himself, gave his soldiers confidence to continue in spite of the tragedy...just as they would experience in war.

Two things quickly jump out at me from our passage today: the Christian life is not a life of ease. No one ever lived more diligently for the will of the Father than Jesus, and His obedience led Him to a cross. Secondly, Paul didn't just tell Thessalonian Christians to feel better, but sent Timothy as an encouragement to them. **Do you feel discouraged as a believer by the trials going on in your life? Just remember, you have access to the throne of God through prayer. And secondly, think about who you could be supporting in our church body? Pastors often hope to have a church more like the early church of the New Testament. The reason for the early church's success was their closely connected community. We live our lives more separately from one another than previous generations of believers. We should be looking for those we can encourage and exhort in their trials, as young Timothy did for this church. Who might God be leading you to encourage today? Will you do it?**

Read 1 Thessalonians 4

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 4:3

My first pastorate required me to write two sermons and a bible study every week. We had a Wednesday night time for adults, in addition to our Sunday morning and evening services. It went from exhilarating to exhausting quickly and I recall one morning finishing an opening draft of one of my sermons. Despite knowing it needed more work, I decided it was good enough and

moved on. It was part weariness and part pride, believing I had already arrived as a preacher in my 7th year of ministry. Now as I enter my 20th year, I am changing my sermon preparation and study habits regularly. Listening to podcasts and conferences from other preachers over the years has encouraged me to keep learning, improving, and ultimately connecting with the Word of God for the people of God.

This entire chapter is a call to refuse spiritual contentment. Even when our devotional times are powerful, our ministry service is effective, and we're even sharing the gospel regularly, there is always room for growth. We all want to know God's will for our lives (what I call the specific will: jobs, relationships, etc), but the general will of God for every believer is a higher priority. His will is our sanctification...our holiness...our becoming more like Jesus. If I am seeking to be more like my Savior, the specific will is going to be much clearer because I have a pre-crisis connection with the Lord. **Wherever you're doing well with the Lord, celebrate it with Him. Tell Him how excited you are by areas He's making Himself known to you. Pray for areas that you feel you just aren't getting it, or areas that feel stagnant and shallow. Don't be embarrassed by your human attitudes, but be honest about them. God knows you and is encouraging you to move from where you are to where you can be in Jesus! Look for your opportunity to know and emulate Jesus more even today!**

Read 1 Thessalonians 5

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thess. 5:16-18

Several years ago, I watched a replay of the 2nd half of a college basketball game between Missouri and Kansas. As a Missouri alum, we are fiercely competitive with Kansas when it comes to sports. While the game was live, I had watched the first half, but turned the game off at halftime when Missouri was down by 20 points. The next morning, I woke up to see that Missouri had stormed back in the 2nd half and won the game. Excitedly I watched the replay to see how Missouri's comeback had unfolded. As I watched, I told myself maybe I needed to stop giving up on my team too early.

Paul is trying to teach a similar lesson to these new believers in the area of persistence. In 1 Thess. 1:2 he is constantly mentioning these believers in prayer. In 2:13, Paul is unceasing in his thankfulness to God in working among these believers. And now Paul encourages us to be unceasing in our prayers. Certain translations change the words for readability, but each time it is the same Greek word for unceasing. Paul is communicating to this church, the incessant nature of living for Jesus all throughout this letter. **We can be quick to quit. Our commitments to prayer, witnessing, reading the Word, and serving in the church often fall flatter than a January gym membership. Are you unceasing in your prayers? Are you unceasing in your pursuit of holiness? Are you unceasing in your efforts to share the gospel? God has many more victories for us are being forfeited by our lack of persistence. Let us chase after the things of God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength today, determining not to accept defeat!**